El Nino helped Nev. bears avoid urban hazards

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

El Nino is long gone for now but its legacy remains, at least when it comes to Nevada bears.

So far this year the rate at which bears are being struck by cars or otherwise handled by wildlife officials is lower than in previous years with drier winters.

According to the Nevada Department of Wildlife there have been just five bears struck by cars in 2016, compared to 19 last year and 18 in 2014. So far this year NDOW has handled 48 bears, compared to 114 last year and 140 in 2014.

Read the whole story

Lake Valley offers chief job to STHS grad

By Kathryn Reed

A South Tahoe High School graduate has been offered the job as fire chief for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

Tim Alameda comes with a wealth of experience, knowledge of the area as well as the issues throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“I’m a firefighters’ fire chief. That is my reputation. I really pay attention to the fine details of how they do their

job," Alameda told *Lake Tahoe News.*

While the board made the offer last week, a contract has not been signed – nor has Alameda even seen one. He's expecting to next week.

Today Alameda is a division chief and the fire marshal for North Tahoe Fire Protection District. He is also the chief for Meeks Bay Fire. North Tahoe and Meeks Bay essentially merged a few years ago, but the latter has a separate administrative structure. The department goes from the West Shore to Kings Beach, so essentially half the basin.

The vacancy at the Meyers-based department came earlier this summer when Gareth Harris was shown the door after five years. He survived two votes of no confidence from his staff, as the board was reluctant to part ways.

Board Chairman Bob Bettencourt chose not to speak with *LTN* about why Alameda was the board's top pick.

Alameda got his start as a firefighter reserve in Meyers in the 1980s. At that time is was a joint program between Lake Valley and South Lake Tahoe fire departments.



1977 South Tahoe High grad Tim Alameda may soon be fire chief in Lake Valley.

Starting in 1984 he spent 27 years with Reno Fire Department.

He went from a rank and file firefighter to the chief.

He already has connections on the South Shore with newly hired Tahoe Douglas Fire Chief Scott Brown and South Lake Tahoe Battalion Chief Tim Spencer having worked at the Reno department.

In 2011, Alameda retired from Reno. North Tahoe recruited him to be a fire marshal. He took this job seriously – spending many a day walking around his jurisdiction, into businesses and talking to people. He was seeing where the hazards were, listened to concerns and helped educate people.

He rose to division chief and then took over Meeks Bay.

Those in the fire community call Alameda a true professional, forward thinker and good with personnel. Until the ink is dry, people were hesitant to go on the record about Alameda. The same goes for his current boss, Mike Schwartz.

Alameda, 57, did not want to discuss the morale issues at the department, the board, or the past.

Once on board he expects to take 90 days to listen and learn.

“I do know the firefighters are extremely respected. We have had several really bad high angle rescues in Meeks Bay and the Lake Valley guys come over. They are methodical and perfect. It’s amazing what they do,” Alameda said.

He knows board member Bettencourt from his early 20s – Alameda is now 57 – because as a U.S. Forest Service firefighter Bettencourt taught his community college wildland fire class.

Wildland fires are something Alameda is well aware of. He was president last year of the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Chief’s Association. The wildland urban interface is a constant issue for fire agencies when it comes to protecting the community from a blaze that starts in the forest.

On Wednesday, Alameda is meeting with a forester from the National Forest Foundation, a nonprofit partner of the Forest Service, to talk about forest fuels in Tahoe.

While he didn't lose a structure during the Angora Fire, a house he and his dad built on Boulder Mountain was destroyed.

"I felt a little bit of that pain," he said.

Those 254 houses that burned in 2007 were part of that wildland urban interface.

He was back in the neighborhood last week with his wife, Lisa. Driving through the burn area is something he does from time to time.

As a kid, he spent many summer days fishing at Angora Lakes or hunting grouse in the area.

Today, Alameda says what free time he has is usually spent with his wife. They have an acre in Nevada with horses and bird dogs. Together they hike a lot. Their two daughters are in the Sparks area; they also have family in South Lake Tahoe.

Vogelgesang: Fiscally responsible approach

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News asked candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Douglas County School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received. All profiles may be found under the Special Projects listing and then the 2106 November***

Candidate Profiles category.



Randy Vogelgesang is running for one of two open seats on the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

Name: Randy Vogelgesang

Age: 59

Job/profession: Civil/structural engineer

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: City of South Lake Tahoe Building Board of Appeals, member Tahoe Engineers Architects and Surveyors, member South Lake Tahoe Rotary, president

Why are you seeking re-election to the South Tahoe PUD board?: To continue building upon my goals and accomplishments of my first term, which I outline below.

Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?: Because of my knowledge, experience and fiscally responsible approach to the challenges the district faces.

What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?: The experience I have gained making common sense engineering decisions in my business has helped greatly when making

decisions for the South Tahoe PUD. I try to always use my knowledge of the district and its workings to make decisions in the best interest of the ratepayers. As president of the board for the past two years, I have made it a point to work with all the board members and to treat them with respect.

Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?: This has been an important issue for me and I have made it a priority to get as much information as possible about the district out to the public. I have long believed that better decisions are made when the public is informed. During my first term the district hosted numerous public workshops focusing on the budget, priorities and long term planning. In addition I have encouraged (along with the board) Richard Solbrig, general manager, to be very active with public outreach on radio, TV and to numerous service organizations. The district's website (www.stpud.us) has recently been upgraded for easier use and greater access to information. At my recommendation, the district started archiving audio files of all of our meetings, which can be heard on the website. In the near future video files will be available on the website.

What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?: The district's property tax revenue is still below the level of 2010. The challenge is to offset that revenue loss by increasing efficiency and seeking other sources of revenue such as grant money. It should be noted that the district has cut operations and maintenance spending by 20 percent since 2008-09.

Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain: No comment

Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain: No comment

Describe three attributes for a successful board:

Communication, respect, cooperation.

What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?: I would prefer a defined contribution over a defined benefit plan as a way to control costs.

Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff: I like to have work done in-house as much as possible but sometimes it is more economical to outsource due to expertise or staff work load.

What is your 10-year vision for STPUD?: I would like to continue with steady needed improvements to the infrastructure to keep the quality of our service high, while being mindful of the cost to the ratepayers.

What as an elected official are the three things you are most proud of during your tenure?: Revising the rate structure (consumption vs. fixed costs) to more accurately reflect actual costs, reducing capacity charge fees, increasing transparency, water line upgrades and adding hydrants for fire protection.

Which votes would you change and why?: I am comfortable with the decisions I have made as a board member.

Being on a board means working as a team. How will you work with the other board members for the greater good of the community?: I touched on this above, but let me add that during my first term this board has worked well together, without acrimony, despite differences in opinion.

What should be the three main priorities for the board?: Striking a balance between infrastructure spending and rates. Salary negotiations. Public outreach.

How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?: This is the most important question that I deal with on a daily basis. Too

much spending on needed infrastructure burdens the ratepayer, but not enough could end up in costing more money in the long run. As a member of the finance committee I spend quite a bit of time working on both the annual budget and the 10-year plan. The way I try to achieve the balance between rates and spending is gathering as much information as I can to make the best decision I can.

STPUD is often criticized for having some of the highest paid public employees on the South Shore. Any comment?: Salary negotiations are one of the most important jobs that the board has. During these negotiations I have always fought for what is best for the ratepayers and will continue to do so.

When it comes to permits for construction, the district has high fees. Do you believe they are fair? Why or why not?: During my first term the board not only stopped large planned connection fee increases, they were lowered. It is my belief that these fees are still too high. I would rather make it easier for us to have more customers using our services than discouraging connections.

Tell us something about yourself that people may not know: My wife Cathy and I have lived in South Lake Tahoe for more than 30 years and raised two kids, Laura and Scott, who are now adults.

Panel sees problems in legalizing recreational

marijuana in Nevada

By Raven Jackson, Las Vegas Review-Journal

In November, Nevadans will vote on whether to legalize recreational marijuana – Question 2 would allow adults 21 years and older to possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana legally. On Saturday, a panel of experts largely argued that legalization might be a bad idea.

Earl White, former director of Weed & Seed Program, a crime and drug abuse prevention group, was one of five speakers who met Sept. 10 at the University of Phoenix Las Vegas campus. He was adamantly against legalizing marijuana for recreational use, arguing pot use lessens someone's motivation to study or find work.

"(Nevada is) already last in education and behind in unemployment," White said. "There is no way that legalizing marijuana is a good thing for the community."

Read the whole story

Lukins Brothers – pioneers in SLT water biz

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Lukins Brothers is more than a water company. It's a family. It's a way of life. It's a part of Lake Tahoe's history as well as its future.

And despite the name, a woman runs it.

No matter what Jenn Lukins' title is, she is the face and voice of the South Shore water purveyor. It is very much a family operation, just like it was when it started in the 1940s.

But much has changed in the intervening years. Lukins talked about the history and life today concerning her company during a Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting; she also delved into the history of water on the South Shore.

It wasn't that her great-grandpa Lloyd Lukins intentionally set out to get into the water business. He had a well, neighbors needed water, and he started selling to them.

At one time the family owned several acres on the outskirts of Camp Richardson on both sides of Highway 89. His family lived in what is now Evans Restaurant. Lukins Resort was a thriving enterprise. The cabins people would rent still exist – they are the little white ones used by a Christian youth group in the summer.



Jenn Lukins is carrying on the family tradition of working for the South Lake Tahoe water company. Photo/LTN file

Lloyd Lukins decided to start subdividing the land in the

mid-1940s, selling the land with water.

In 1953, the state awarded Lukins Brothers a certificate to provide water to the 20 seasonal customers. Today the water company has 974 customers; of which more than 80 percent are full-time residents.

Something that Lloyd Lukins did that turned heads at the time was to put in 4-inch waterlines instead of the three-quarter inch that were the norm then. He was a visionary.

Lukins is not the oldest water company in South Lake Tahoe – that distinction goes to Lakeside Park, which started in 1904. It still operates near the state line.

In the early years there were also Globins, Tahoe Sierra, Martin Family, Tahoe Paradise and Tahoe Keys water systems.

South Tahoe Public Utility District started in 1950 as a sewer company with a pump on Ski Run Boulevard. Septic tanks were used prior to that. Now septic tanks are illegal in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

In the next decade South Tahoe PUD bought the Globin water company, and then many of the others.

Today water on the California side of the South Shore either comes from Lukins, STPUD, Tahoe Keys or Lakeside. STPUD still handles all the sewer.

What has changed the most are all the regulations from the state and feds. For Lukins, the California Public Utilities Commission and state Water Resources Control Board are the two big overseers. They control rate increases, water quality, regulate water flow for fires and other aspects of the business. The overriding issues are health and safety for customers.

Contaminants in the water are something Lloyd Lukins didn’t have to contend with, but are an every day worry for his

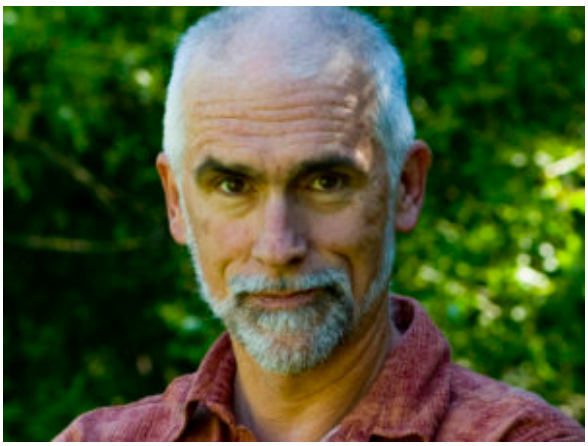
great-granddaughter. **PCE** or tetrachloroethylene was first detected in South Lake Tahoe's groundwater in 1989. Lukins' wells were affected in 2014, though it's not the only water company with PCE. The company is working to put in a filtration system, while the state continues to try to isolate the source.

PCE was a commonly used chemical in dry cleaning and automotive businesses. Lake Tahoe Laundry Works used to be at Y in the Raley's center. That is a known source for PCE contamination right there and had originally been thought to be the source of the plumes below TJ Maxx and Classic Cue.

Climate change is another issue Jenn deals with that Lloyd never had to. While regionally the use of water is declining and aquifer is healthy, it is snowmelt that recharges the underground water. With less snow predicted for the future, at some point the availability of water could become an issue in the basin.

Hamilton: Background, experience with LTCC

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Dave Hamilton is one of two candidates for the Area 4 seat for Lake Tahoe Community College.

Name: David Hamilton

Age: 60 (as of October)

Job/profession: Retired college educator

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: Local organizations: Currently part of core group forming the Tahoe Arts Alliance; president, Tahoe Tallac Association board of directors; 2007 board member from 2004-2014; member Pathway 2007 Forum (TRPA and LTBMU plan updates) representing non-motorized recreation in the Lake Tahoe Basin: 2005-2008;m ember of Public Lands Working group for Placed Based Planning Workshops, 2007; member board of directors Tahoe Rim Trail Association 2000-2003; member of initial planning committee for Van Sickle Park: 2000; president Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Association 1998-2005; member board of directors, Tahoe Arts Project 1990-92; president, board of directors South Lake Tahoe Theatre Company, 1990-1994

Regional/statewide organizations: member board of directors California Educational Theatre Association, 1993-1999, 2004, 2006-08 representing higher education; president board of directors Northern California Educational Theatre Association,

1993-1995, vice president 1990-1993

Why are you running for the college board?: My first connection with LTCC was taking classes back in 1976. I was first employed by the college in 1977 and I first taught at the college in 1984 then hired as a full time instructor in 1989 working until 2008. I consider Lake Tahoe Community College my college and I have been involved with much of its history. I helped write the original mission statement, participated in many annual planning sessions and three accreditations. Not only is LTCC a vital fixture, but also a large part of our community's future. As a member of the board of trustees I want to continue serving the college in its important role for our students and community.

Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?: First, I have extensive background and experience with the college. As a faculty member over the years I connected with all types of students, getting to know them and understanding their academic needs. I was very involved with innovation in teaching and learning. In academic service I served as president of both the Academic Senate and the Faculty Association. I worked closely with the business office in the design and construction of the theatre as well as its yearly budget. I also served as a part time administrator gaining experience in administrative operations. I have worked as an administrator outside the district at other colleges, gaining insight to other ways of being successful within the California Community College system. But that experience is only one piece of why I would deserve the vote. South Lake Tahoe is my home town. I first moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1968. I graduated from STHS and have had about 38 full time years here. In that time I have been involved in many community projects and organizations. I have extensive experience in working as a member of a board of directors and feel I am innovative, collaborative and inclusive in that work.

What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?: Though I have all this experience with the college, it really just amounts to having knowledge and doesn't by itself make me an effective board member. I think what makes me uniquely qualified is that I have spent a large part of my career working collaboratively with groups of people to achieve a goal. Whether it is directing a play, which involves bringing a new group of people together to build a production, negotiating a union contract, working within the boards of various nonprofits or being a member of the Pathway 2007 Forum which updated the TRPA Regional Plan. I believe I have an ability to help synthesize ideas and discussion into agreement and forward movement. I enjoy group synergy and work hard to establish positive working relationships with individuals and the community.

Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?: I believe the college already does a good job making sure the community is aware of what is going on. Accreditation requires the college to be accountable for how it operates. Though accreditation is only every six years, it ensures the college has processes and policies that ensure it is staying on track. As a public agency under the Brown Act the public has access to all board meetings as well as documents such as the budget, policies and procedures, etc. The college has been good about providing easy access to those documents. As a trustee I would want to make sure the Board communicates with both the public and staff in an open and timely manner. Processes for communication need to be clear and effective. Any decision made should have background and justification available.

What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?: The budget process with the college involves many layers. It would be difficult to pick

out a specific that is, or isn't, valid without understanding all the background and discussion. That being said, in a general sense and based on the past few years of data, I support the current budget being based on zero growth. The F2F FTE (number of general students) is still dropping and though it has been filled in in other categories it is a good idea to not over-project. The college has traditionally been fiscally conservative in budget projections and I think that is wise in the current climate. I also support the level of reserves and the additional funds for STRS/PERS reserve. In the change area, one of the things that stands out for me, though it is not in the current budget, is why the college is spending money from Measure F on the bleachers and scoreboard in the gym. To my knowledge they are not currently used much and we do not have any competitive sports that need them. Again, I wasn't in on the discussion, but that doesn't seem like a priority.

Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain: Yes I support it. I think the improvement in living standards would outweigh the effect on employment and increases in consumer costs. In Tahoe it will be felt strongly because we have a lot of small businesses that are barely making it now and they will take the brunt of the change. But at the same time, students coming to LTCC from out of town need to be able to make a living wage while going to school, no matter what job they find.

Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain: Even though Proposition 30 was a temporary tax, I feel that we have been able to absorb it without undue stress to our higher income earners. In addition, Prop. 55 does not extend the one-quarter cent sales tax. The money helps in areas that always need help, schools and health care. Though the state is recovering from the recession, I think it will be beneficial to extend this formula.

Describe three attributes for a successful board:

Collaborative, innovative and responsive. They should be collaborative in making decisions using their collective knowledge in a synergy to make good decisions. They should be innovative in thinking as the college must grow and change with the ever changing environment of higher education. They should be open to new ideas brought forth as well being able to think outside the box. And they must be responsive to the public and staff of the college with open communication and dialogue as well as timely responses to issues and concerns.

What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?: Defined benefits have a long and involved history. The college deals with PERS and STRS. Unlike many other government entities, LTCC has not negotiated substantial benefits for retirees beyond the state level benefits. Both retirement systems are significantly out of balance in terms of unfunded liabilities. The process to make both systems fully funded has begun to take more money from both members and employers. LTCC, anticipating these continued increases is placing money into reserves to cover increasing costs. So the question is, is it worth it for the state to continue these systems as they are? Defined benefits have basically disappeared in the general workforce. Many people see them as a taxpayer gift to public employees. This is reinforced by sensationalized examples of the highest end of retirees, the people who make six figures in retirement. But the reality is that the average retiree makes significantly less and a large portion of their retirement is money they have contributed out of their salary. I think overall they are working to get the systems sustainable. As the economy improves and the market goes up, so too will the amount each retirement system has. For the college it is still a way to attract people to jobs. As the LTCC board we only have the ability to augment the retirement systems. And that is the place where we would need to be very careful in how much money that would be in the long term.

Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff: In general contracting out work should only happen for a three main reasons. Either it is temporary work that staff does not have the expertise to accomplish, it is work that would overload staff beyond their ability to complete and/or an outside contractor will save a significant amount of money. Your question indicates work "normally done by staff", which would seem to indicate contracting out different services to a private contractor. It depends on the nature of what the situation is. If it is a long term situation then the benefits must be examined. An example would be janitorial work. It is often less expensive to hire a service to clean rooms, restrooms etc. than to hire full time janitors. But you have less control and flexibility with a service so you must balance the results with the costs. If there are substantial savings, that money could be put to better use, though on some level, you get what you pay for. An outside contractor does not necessarily have your best interests at heart, as their primary interest will be financial. I think the key is consistent monitoring of outside contracts to make sure you are achieving your goals with them.

What is your 10-year vision for LTCC?: It will be very interesting to see where the California Community Colleges are in 10 years. I believe the system is currently undergoing fundamental changes to its mission and what we see 10 years from now may look very different from what we see today. I would like to see LTCC continue to build a reputation as a destination college beyond the beauty of being in Tahoe. Part of this will be the introduction of new, unique programs such as the current fire science or wilderness programs that provide students training, certificates and/or degrees that will draw students from outside the area. The college will not be able to rely purely on transfer programs. If new programs can build the student population then that will help the college keep the breadth of programs it has now and will make it financially sustainable with faculty and staff making

equitable wages. I would also vision greater partnerships with universities and participation in offering Bachelor degrees. The potential for student housing is still a reality. If it is financially sustainable that could also provide a resource to attract and retain students.

What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?: Again, without having been in on the planning and discussions I wouldn't want to second guess decisions made by the board. It is also easy to see the results of a decision in hindsight and thus disagree with it. But I am of the belief that once a decision is reached, whether you vote to agree or disagree, you live with that decision and move on.

How many meetings have you attended this year for the board you are running for?: Over this year, none. I recently finished a one-year assignment as dean business, design and workforce at Cañada College in the Bay Area and was only home on weekends. Prior to that I have been to an occasional board meeting, though when I was Senate President I was at many. The agendas and minutes are posted, so it not difficult to keep up on discussion and decisions.

What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of college?: I have been catching up on the current state of the college. I have read the current plans and budget. Having been connected with the college I have a context for the content of the goals and strategic plan and understand how the college is moving forward.

Being on a board means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the community?: As I had stated above, I work well in collaborative decision-making. I already know the members of the current board and have worked with a couple members in different settings. As a new board member I would take the time to strengthen relationships with the rest of the Board

and not simply come in with thoughts about what I think should happen. The reason we are all elected is to represent the community and provide a collective voice to help direct the college.

What should be the three main priorities for the board?: 1. Help the college achieve its mission 2. Maintain the fiscal health of the college 3. Represent the public interest.

What have you done to make yourself ready to be a board member?: I suppose one way I have made myself ready to be an LTCC board member by being involved with the college and the community over the last 45 years. More specifically, I am now current on college policies and procedures as well the recent budget and issues the college has faced.

What is your opinion about career and technical education at the high school level?: CTE is a vital component of our education system. Along with providing a general education, our education system gets students ready for careers they will pursue in life. Many careers in today's world require training but not necessarily in a traditional academic environment. And many of these career paths can begin in high school. By providing hands on career training opportunities (CTE) in high school we can shorten the time needed for students to transition from high school into successful careers. And CTE is no longer seen as simply traditional blue collar jobs or an end in itself. CTE now represents pathways with multiple entry and exit points and also represents high paying careers. An example would be the tech industry. In high school students could get hands on experience in coding and/or graphic design which might transition them to a program at a community college where they could achieve a certificate or degree that would place them into a high demand area where they could earn a significant salary. At some point they might take that work experience and re-enter a training program to further their skills for a next level job or change careers entirely. The work they did in high school would fast track them at the next

level, having them career ready with less time and cost. The state is currently providing funding for these pathways through the CTE Transitions program, which connects CTE high school students with degree and certificate pathways in a community college.

What will you look for in a new college president?: If I am elected to the board, the new college president will have been selected and will be starting the same time I do. I have faith that the current board will have made the best choice based on the profile given in the search announcement. As the new superintendent/president begins I would look for the building of a solid relationship with the board, the college and the community. We are a small community and the more engaged and active the president can be with both the college community as well as our greater community, the better.

Tell us something about yourself that people may not know: Two things: First, I once performed with the San Francisco Symphony at Davies Hall and I don't play an instrument. They did a performance of "The Flood" by Stravinsky which had spoken parts, of which I got to do one. Second, I know Nancy Dalton who is also running. I think she is also well qualified and an excellent person and community member. It will be a win for the college either way.

As a former instructor at LTCC, how can the public believe you will represent everyone and not just staff?: I understand what it means to be a trustee. As a trustee I do not represent the staff at all. I represent the public interest and my job is to work with the entire board to help the college fulfill its mission and to make sure the use of taxpayer money is responsible. The only thing I represent as an individual board member are the people in Area 4. Even when I was an instructor at the college I understood the importance of every element of the college to make everything function well. I had no illusions that my needs were more vital than any others.

TTD uses technology to track Tahoe traffic

By Alexandra Spychalsky, Moonshine Ink

Getting anywhere around the lake can be a daunting task on summer weekends. When you’re moving so slowly in a car that cyclists are whizzing by you, all you can do is crank up the radio and settle in for a long ride.

As a growing and changing population in Tahoe presents new problems, local agencies are pursuing new technologies to help them better understand our community and its needs. High-tech data collection methods, like those currently being used by the Tahoe Transportation District and Truckee, can reveal trends that were never before quantifiable, and help track compliance with town rules that were previously too difficult to enforce.

TTD seeks to make traveling to and within the basin more efficient and enjoyable. It is now using cell phone data to gather information on where visitors come from, how they enter the basin, and where they go when they are here.

Read the whole story

Future looks bright for Tahoe

yellow cress

By Tom Lotshaw

In the late 1990s, Tahoe yellow cress, a small flowering plant that grows only on the sandy shores and creek mouths of Lake Tahoe, was teetering on the brink of extinction. Surveys done in 1996 found the plant gone from all of the beaches it had once occupied in Nevada and growing at fewer than 10 sites in California after a lengthy period of high lake levels.

In the years since, populations have rebounded, and today the plant has a much brighter future. That’s due in part to a collaborative, basinwide conservation strategy that was launched in 2001 with regulatory and land management agencies, private property owners, and the public all working together to protect a species found nowhere else in the world.

The strategy is working. Last October, after a lengthy review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that Tahoe yellow cress does not warrant listing as a federally endangered or threatened species, saving the basin and its property owners from a new level of federal regulations to protect the unique native plant.



A basinwide conservation strategy has helped Tahoe yellow cress rebound to

where it is no longer considered endangered or threatened. Photo/Tom Lotshaw

The Tahoe partnership's work to protect Tahoe yellow cress has "truly exemplified the most basic function of the Endangered Species Act—to protect and conserve ecosystems and the species that depend upon them," the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said. "They have continued to raise the standards for the next generation of conservation and convinced us that Tahoe yellow cress has a bright future on the beautiful shores of Lake Tahoe."

The plant has always had a precarious existence, growing only at the margins of a single lake where it became geographically isolated at some point during Lake Tahoe's 2-million-year history. To grow and reproduce, populations must shift up and down the beach each year with ever-changing water levels. The plant also faces continual threats from beach trampling and beach raking at Tahoe's heavily-visited shoreline.

Public agencies have worked to protect the sandy beaches and the creek mouths where Tahoe yellow cress grows and have also repopulated sites with plantings. But with half of Tahoe's 75 miles of shoreline privately owned, private property owners are also playing a key role in protecting the plant.

The Tahoe Lakefront Owners Association has worked with its many members for 20 years to help provide sanctuary for the plant, and to get people to recognize that it's a positive thing, not a negative thing, to have it growing on their private property, Director Jan Brisco said.

"I think we're getting closer to having that safe harbor. We've had many people step up wanting to become Tahoe yellow cress stewards and offering their property for surveys or plantings so we can keep the plant alive and thriving along the shores," Brisco said. "Every spring I go out to my members

with information to remind them when they are cleaning up to be careful about the plants. We are really excited how well we've done to be where we are today."

Tahoe yellow cress is part of Tahoe's unique natural environment, and a shining conservation success story for one of the many rare and unique plants struggling to survive in California and Nevada.

"It's such a great group of resource managers, scientists, and private property owners who have come together to protect this plant," said Alison Stanton, an independent botanist who has helped guide the Tahoe yellow cress conservation strategy and restoration work since 2002.

Despite the success of the conservation strategy and the more than a dozen partners in the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group, the hardy little yellow plant that calls Lake Tahoe home will always require protection and awareness due to its extremely limited range and habitat.

"It's a unique plant growing at a single lake so the stakes are high for it. Our work is not done. We have to continue to implement the conservation strategy and the stewardship program or we'll find ourselves right back in the same place," Stanton said.

Tom Lotshaw is the public information officer for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This story first appeared in ***Tahoe In Depth****.*

David: STPUD 6.5% rate hike was wrong

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News asked candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Douglas County School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received. All profiles may be found under the Special Projects listing and then the 2106 November Candidate Profiles category.***



Kirk David is running for one of two open seats on the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

Name: Kirk A David

Age: 48

Job/profession: General contractor

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: Youth coach for last 17 years. AYSO and club soccer, ASA and high school softball, Pop Warner football, high school basketball (boys and girls), Little

League and Babe Ruth baseball.

Why are you running for the South Tahoe PUD board?: I want to be involved in our community and I feel this is a good opportunity to help and be a service by having a voice on the board. Life is full of challenges and learning experiences and I look forward to the opportunity.

Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?: My wife, Jennifer, and I were very fortunate to raise our two children here. I have roots In Tahoe and I am invested in our community and our future. I care about Tahoe's unique environment and understand and appreciate what our community requires.

What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?: My environmental studies degree and background in construction are two strong qualities in a board candidate. The skills I have acquired in owning and operating my business have given me the ability to develop efficient leadership skills that can motivate groups in a positive direction toward a common goal.

Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?: I am honest and fair and I would work with the district to ensure the same values and clarency that I believe in.

What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?: I agree that the budget should not be dependent or reliant on guaranteed property tax increases. I don't agree with the 6.5 percent annual rate hike.

Describe three attributes for a successful board: The ability to work well together, work through tough conflicts, and provide good service.

What are your thoughts about public employee defined

benefits?: Great for an employee. Paying for the benefits is costly.

Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff: If contracting out is costing more money, I would like to find a way for the work to be done in house.

What is your 10-year vision for STPUD?: Continue to provide the great services they provide. Continue and improve upon the environmental commitment our district currently has. Provide an affordable service for our local community.

What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?: The 6.5 percent annual rate hike. I understand the need for meters and improvements in our district, but I don't like the path of increased rates we are on.

How many meetings have you attended this year for the board you are running for?: I have yet to attend a meeting; I regularly read the board minutes.

What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of the district?: I've read the plan and I have seen their finances and goals online.

Being on a board means working as a team. How will you work with the other board members for the greater good of the community?: I work well with other people, and I have no doubt that I would work well with the board to serve our community.

What should be the three main priorities for the board?: Ensure the continued outstanding service our district provides, control our rate increases, work well with district staff.

How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?: The district must run as efficiently as possible to ensure rates stay

controlled.

STPUD is often criticized for having some of the highest paid public employees on the South Shore. Any comment?: STPUD is known as being a good workplace, if elected I would know more about this topic.

When it comes to permits for construction, the district has high fees. Do you believe they are fair? Why or why not?: I feel the connection fees are high, as with water and sewer rates the connection fees increase each year.

Tell us something about yourself that people may not know: I worked as a deckhand on a whale watching/snorkel boat in Kaanapali for six months.

Multimillion-dollar fines for starting forest fire

By Wes Siler, Outside

In Oregon, two elderly men are being billed $37 million for a fire the state says they started with their lawn mowers. In California, a homeowner is being charged $25 million for a fire authorities claim was sparked by a known electrical problem at his house. Could you be stuck with a similar multimillion-dollar tab for accidentally starting a wildfire?

The answer used to be no. “In the United States, we’ve had a very cavalier attitude toward fires,” says J. Curtis Varone, a former firefighter who now practices law and specializes in fire litigation. “We consider fires to be an accident that’s really nobody’s fault.”

But with wildfires exploding across the American West—the number is up 70 percent in California so far in 2016—local and state governments have decided that typical civil penalties for causing a fire are no longer good enough. The two men in Oregon were fined just $550 for a fire that ultimately cost the state at least $37 million to extinguish.

Read the whole story